

Is Hahnemann's therapeutic system a mystica?

To the Editor: I refer to the recent editorial by Professor Van Niekerk on traditional healers in which Hahnemann's system, or homeopathic therapeutics (HTS), is termed a 'mystica', a religious belief.¹

HTS arose out of therapeutic uncertainty – how to match, akin to a pass word, a therapy with a disease of a particular patient. Hahnemann discovered in 1790 the experimental methodology termed provings, the homeopathic pathogenic trial (HPT), on disagreeing with the Scottish Hippocrates, Cullen, on the action of Peruvian bark. Hahnemann's intuitive ingestion of bark elicited symptoms and signs of malaria, the HPT. Thus, bark induces a mild similar artificial disease which cures the similar severe disease of the patient – the age-old theory, the similarity. During an HPT, knowledge and experience of a medicine's specific actions are elicited via the healthy, linking diagnosis and therapy prior to its clinical application; thus, specific therapeutics (SRx). The similarity as guiding principle means matching an SRx with the disease of the patient to achieve a successful clinical outcome, which links the diagnosis, therapy and outcome,² approximating therapeutic certainty.

The validity of HTS can be analysed conceptually by the sciences, and the applied sciences. Medicine is an applied science like engineering; however, the social acceptance of science is attributed to its powerful engineering products.

A scientific theory, says Lakatos,³ must have 'positive heuristics'; i.e. 'problem-solving'; e.g. Einstein's general theory of relativity solved the planet Mercury's problematic orbit, while certain theories were verified by 'dramatic confirming instances' and not 'crucial experiments'; e.g. Newton's laws were accepted after Halley's Comet's calculated return 72 years later.³ The high quality of a technology must be designed into it from the outset – it won't work better than originally designed. And, scientific evidence is depicted by, e.g., the first flight of Airbus A380 aircraft, one assembled aircraft – a high-quality product demonstrated outside the laboratory. Furthermore, it is inept to experiment on a mature product.

HTS has 'positive heuristics'. They approximate therapeutic certainty, designed into medicines from the outset, so achieving the aim of the profession – a 'right and good healing action taken in the interest of a particular patient', one patient, achieved not 'fortuitously', otherwise the profession is 'inauthentic and a lie'.⁴ Its scientific evidence is its clinical successes, its 'confirming instances' or 'anecdotes' in, e.g., cholera epidemics. Nevertheless, HTS can't replace, for example, lignocaine or surgery.

In conclusion, Hahnemann's system isn't a 'mystica', and this letter is based on an article published elsewhere.^{5,6}

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